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# Political and Institutional Determinants of Immigration Policies

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This paper investigates how the interplay of parties' preferences, political institutions and electoral competition affects the liberalization of immigration policies. It joins a growing body of research that focuses on the role of domestic factors in shaping immigration policies. While several studies point to the important role of partisanship and the activation of public opinion, they fail to provide a clear mechanism that takes into account differences in parties' preferences as well as the institutional context they act in. By adding two crucial factors to the analysis, this paper presents a new framework for liberal change in the field of immigration politics. First, institutional veto points determine if left-of-center parties can reform policies according to their preferences. Second, the degree of electoral competition and the politicization of immigration issues affect how susceptible political parties are to the anti-immigrant sentiment in the population. A time-series cross-section analysis of 11 countries from 1980-2006 shows that left-of-center governments are more likely to pass liberal reforms, but only if they are not facing an open veto point. Moreover, increased levels of electoral competition coupled with a politicization of the immigration issue reduces the likelihood of liberal reforms.

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# 1 Introduction

While immigration has been a central issue in the social sciences for a long time, a systematic comparative analysis of actual policies is quite new to the discipline. Starting with Rogers Brubaker's (1992) analysis of citizenship policies<sup>1</sup> in Germany and France a growing body of research has investigated similarities and differences in national legal practices concerning citizenship and immigration. Several scholars argue that as a result of global social phenomena such as de-nationalization, transnationalism and the growing impact of human rights norms, immigration policies have been liberalized throughout industrialized democracies over the past decades (Sassen, 2008; Soysal, 1994). These approaches, however, fail to account for the diverging trends that can be observed in advanced democracies and especially within Europe. While there is little doubt that globalization and transnationalism create a general pressure to adapt immigration policies (such as naturalization requirements, birth rights and dual citizenship), the view that this pressure inevitably leads to liberalization has been challenged on theoretical as well as empirical grounds. Hence, growing attention has been directed towards the role of domestic political factors in shaping policy outcomes in this field, with the main focus on the role of political parties and public opinion as determinants of liberalizing policies (Howard, 2006; Joppke, 2003; Hansen and Köhler, 2005). Based on their ideological predisposition left-of-center parties are associated with liberalization and de-ethnicization while the opposite is true for conservative and right-wing parties (Joppke, 2003; Helbling, 2013). Facing a highly immigration-skeptic and latently xenophobic public, however, even left-wing governments will refrain from liberalization if this public opinion gets "activated" through a campaign, a referendum or a successful radical-right party (Howard, 2009, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup>While this study focuses on immigration policies, a part of the literature deals with the more narrow area of citizenship policies, which can be regarded as a subfield of immigration policies. The hypothesis derived in this paper build on those insights that can be reasonably transferred to the more general field.

While this body of literature makes an important contribution to the research on citizenship and immigration policies, the assumed process of policy-making in these studies is to a large degree underspecified. All these studies model the law-making process as a direct transformation of actors' preferences into policy outputs and thereby neglect the role of political institutions. It is assumed that parties' ideological preferences are directly transferred into liberalization or conservative stability and that public opinion, if activated, simply keeps politicians from reform efforts. In consequence, these approaches fail to acknowledge the factors that determine if the preferences of government parties, indeed, lead to policy change as well as those that affect parties' reactivity to public opinion.

This article aims at bridging this gap by providing a novel framework for the liberalization of immigration policies that takes into account parties' policy change capability as well as the impact of electoral competition on parties' preferences.<sup>2</sup> First, institutional veto points determine if left-of-center governments have the opportunity to pass legislation that will liberalize immigration policies. If right-wing parties hold a majority in a chamber of parliament that needs to agree to legislation, it gives these parties an opportunity to block liberal reforms. Second, the degree of electoral competition that governing parties are facing determines their trade-off between vote- and office- or policy-seeking and thus affects how likely governments will pass unpopular reforms. This, however, depends on the saliency of the immigration issue. When electoral competition is high, parties cannot ignore a politicized issue paired with an anti-immigrant public sentiment, which in turn will block liberalization.

Analyzing a new data set that combines information on immigration reforms with data on political institutions, political majorities, issue salience and electoral competition

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<sup>2</sup>This paper limits itself to analyzing liberalization as the politics of restrictive change should follow a fundamentally different logic because they are far less an exercise in blame avoidance and should depend on different agenda setting events. Integrating these diverging incentives lies beyond the scope of this paper.

for eleven industrialized democracies from 1980-2006, this paper demonstrates that the liberalization of immigration policies depends on veto points and the competitiveness of elections. Left-of-center governments are only more likely to pass liberalizing reforms if these reforms cannot be blocked by an open veto point. Moreover, high levels of electoral competition in the context of a politicized issue reduce governments' efforts to liberalize immigration policies. These findings demonstrate the necessity of taking the institutional context as well as parties' strategic incentives into account when analyzing policy-making in the field of citizenship and immigration.

## 2 The Politics of Citizenship and Immigration

The literature on citizenship and immigration policies can largely be separated into two categories. One branch emphasizes the various pressures that should lead to more liberalization. The other one analyzes domestic factors that can account for national variations in policy outcomes.

Looking at the changing role of the nation-state, researchers have emphasized three developments as driving forces of policy liberalization in the area of citizenship and immigration: globalization and internationalization (Sassen, 2008); the growing importance of human rights in international politics (Soysal, 1994) and the changed conception of citizenship as a result of large amounts of immigration (Geddes, 2003; Hansen and Weil, 2001; Joppke, 1999). All these developments are strongly linked to each other, manifested in the decreasing role of the nation-state and national politics and are finally supposed to result in more liberal policies as an answer to these challenges.

However, looking at the de facto development throughout the industrialized democracies, which all share these changing contextual conditions, one can see significant variation in the degree to which these countries have actually liberalized their immigration policies.

[Insert Figure 1 - Restrictiveness of Immigration Laws over Time - about here]

This is demonstrated in Figure 1 which shows the developments of immigration policies since 1980 based on data collected by Ortega and Peri (2013). Not taking into account historical variation (all countries start at 0) it indicates how two sets of policies (“stay” and “entry”) have developed over time (with higher values indicating more restrictive policies). While some countries such as Sweden or Canada have seen substantial liberal change through, for example, the reduction of residence requirements for naturalization others have remained the same or, as in the case of Denmark, have even increased their restrictiveness. Conditions such as globalization and growing numbers of immigrants, which all these countries have in common, cannot account for these diverging trajectories. Hence, it is necessary to investigate variations in domestic politics in order to explain the different outcomes in these countries (see also Koopmans, Michalowski and Waibel, 2012; Vink and Groot, 2010). This is not to say that the international dimension does not matter at all. On the contrary, these conditions constitute an essential part of the pressure for policy liberalization. However this pressure is not inevitably transformed into reforms. The literature on domestic politics determinants of citizenship and immigration policies has identified two sets of factors that play a key role in explaining variations in national policies: parties’ political ideology as well as issue salience and anti-immigration public attitudes.

## **2.1 Political Parties and Veto Points**

As in several other policy areas, scholars have argued that the ideological preferences of political parties play a crucial role for differences in policy outcomes in the field of citizenship and immigration. Left-wing parties are associated with de-ethnicizing policies, i.e. measures to open access to citizenship to newcomers and allow membership apart from ethnic elements through, for example, the introduction of *ius soli* elements (Joppke,

2003, 436). On the other hand, conservative and right-wing parties favor re-ethnicization including a new focus on common cultural heritage and values (Joppke, 2003, 442). Helbling (2013) also demonstrates how left-of-center parties use less nationalistic and more moral-universal frames when addressing issues of immigration. Hence, the liberalization of citizenship and immigration policies should be strongly linked to efforts of left-wing parties, while blockage, exclusion and more restrictive measures are part of the conservative agenda. While scholars in the field of citizenship policies seem to generally agree that left-wing parties are associated with a more liberal ideology (Howard, 2009; Janoski, 2010), one might question if these preferences can be generalized to the whole field of immigration policies (see also Givens and Luedtke, 2005). Figure 2 and Figure 3, thus, provide empirical evidence on this question.

[Insert Figure 2 - Parties' Policy Positions on Immigration (CHES Data) - about  
here]

Figure 2 presents parties' immigration policy preferences based on data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey in 2006 and 2010 (Bakker et al., 2014). We can see the distribution of positions separately for Social democratic and Conservative (including Christian democratic and secular Conservative parties) parties with higher values indicating more restrictive positions. While the median for Social democratic parties lies at 4.4, it is 6.9 for Conservative parties and thus substantively higher (we are dealing with a 10 point scale). The difference is also highly statistically significant. Figure 2 thus indicates that Social democratic parties hold substantially more liberal positions on immigration issues than their conservative competitors. One caveat of using the CHES data for this comparison is that expert judgements for parties' immigration positions are limited to the years 2006 and 2010.

[Insert Figure 3 - Parties' Policy Positions on Immigration (Manifesto Data) -  
about here]

Figure 3 thus presents the same graph based on manifesto data from the CMP/MARPOR project (Volgens et al., 2013). The advantage of using this graph is that it includes data reaching back to 1980. However, the manifesto data unfortunately does not include a specific category for immigration. The coding of the immigration positions for this graph, thus, follows Alonso and da Fonseca (2011) and includes several categories such as positions on multiculturalism and national way of life.<sup>3</sup> Again, we can see that Conservative parties have considerably stronger anti-immigrant positions than Social democratic parties. This difference as well is highly statistically significant. Hence, the empirical evidence clearly supports the claim that mainstream left parties hold more liberal positions than the mainstream right when it comes to immigration policies.

This, however, does not necessarily mean that left-wing parties in government will inevitably lead to a liberalization of citizenship and immigration policies (see for example Koopmans, Michalowski and Waibel, 2012). Although it is reasonable to argue that parties' ideological preferences matter for changes in immigration policies, directly inferring policy outputs from a government's ideological composition largely ignores the institutional context of policy-making. While governments at some point may want to liberalize policies, they might lack the political opportunity to do so. In order to determine a government's policy change capability, it is necessary to look at the institutional veto points in a specific policy making context. The veto point approach (Immergut, 1990, 1992) considers the political decision-making process as a chain of decisions made in several political arenas and looks at the institutions necessary to enable legislation. A veto point is by definition a counter-majoritarian political institution that gives political and societal actors the opportunity to block legislation. It should be emphasized that veto points by themselves do not block legislation, but their effect depends on political majorities. Veto points impede changes only if they are "open," that is if government

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<sup>3</sup>The exact procedure of the coding is to subtract the shares of pro immigration issues (per607 and per705 in the data) from the negative issues (per601, per602 and per608 in the data).



parties do not hold a majority in these arenas (Immergut, 2010). Hence, veto points in a dynamic way determine governments' capability to change the status quo.

For the case of immigration policies, open veto points should, thus, determine governments' opportunities for liberal change. While a left-of-center government may want to liberalize policies, if it faces a chamber with a right-of-center majority and the power to block legislation, this will significantly impede the chances for reform. Not taking the role of veto points into account when analyzing immigration policies is a potential source for the diverging empirical findings in this field. Left-wing governments are only capable of passing liberal legislation if they command the necessary majorities in all legislative arenas. This leads us to hypothesis 1.

H 1 Left-of-center governments are only more likely to pass liberal reforms if they are not facing an open veto point.

## **2.2 Public Opinion and Electoral Competition**

The second set of factors that has been emphasized when explaining national differences in citizenship and immigration policies is public opinion and issue salience. As the electorate throughout all industrialized democracies can be described as highly critical of immigrants and latently xenophobic (see for example Citrin et al., 1997; Sides and Citrin, 2007), and public policy in democracies is accountable to the preferences of the electorate, liberalizing citizenship and immigration policies becomes a challenging task for democratic governments (Breunig, Cao and Luedtke, 2012). However, a law-making process behind closed doors with as little public attention as possible should generally favor liberalizing change (Givens and Luedtke, 2005). This particularly results from interest groups and elites having an interest in liberalization, high-skilled immigration, and legal security for immigrants. The lower issue salience and public attention, so the argument goes, the higher the possibility of interest groups to influence the policy-

making process and the higher the possibility for parties to find consensus and forge agreements. However, if the debate is expanded, issue salience increased and the public more attentive, harmonized and liberalizing policy change becomes much less likely (Givens and Luedtke, 2004; Hansen and Köhler, 2005).

Combining these approaches with parties' ideological predispositions, Howard develops a framework for explaining liberal change and restrictive continuity of citizenship policies (Howard, 2009, 2010). While left parties in government are a necessary condition for liberal change, as soon as the generally migration skeptic public gets "activated" through the existence of a successful radical right party, a referendum or a popular movement, the reform efforts of a government can be blocked. Using the vote share of radical right parties as an indicator for the activation of the public and correlating it with changes in a newly developed citizenship policy index, Howard presents empirical evidence in support of his hypothesis (Howard, 2010).

While Howard's research without any doubt marks an important step towards a more coherent analysis of citizenship and immigration policies, there are some significant problems with his analysis both at an empirical and a theoretical level. Empirically, using correlations with average radical right support over time, (in addition to the obvious risk of omitted variable bias) is highly problematic as changes in the citizenship policy index are not gradual, but the result of one or two reforms at specific moments in time. Hence, investigating a linear continuous impact of radical right support is not adequate. It is necessary to analyze which conditions were present or absent when governments successfully liberalized their citizenship and immigration regimes. In addition to this, theoretically, it remains unclear how public opinion on immigration affects governing parties and why "activation" should always block reforms. Parties vary in their receptiveness to public opinion and will choose their policy strategies mainly as a function of political competition (Kitschelt, 2002). Hence, the important question to be asked is

why and under what circumstances public opinion matters to politicians in the context of immigration reform.

In order to conceptualize parties' reactivity to public opinion, it is necessary to take parties' diverging preferences into account. In the literature on party competition there is agreement that parties' preferences can be divided into vote-, office- and policy-seeking (Strøm, 1990). Stating that an activated public opinion inevitably will block parties' reform efforts only focuses on a party's vote-seeking strategy. If an important issue has been politicized, from a vote-seeking perspective it would be a strategic mistake to pass legislation that goes against the electorate's preferences. However, from an office- and policy-seeking perspective parties should not necessarily follow this strategy. While being tough on immigration might constitute a vote-maximizing strategy, it will likely alienate moderate parties whose support can be necessary to form a coalition (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008). Similarly, as discussed earlier, parties are subject to various forms of pressures by elite-groups that favor more liberal policies. These are not only activist- and traditionally left groups but also employer associations who have business interests in more liberal policies (Bale, 2008). Hence, following their office- and policy-seeking goals, parties have an incentive to take a more liberal stance on citizenship and immigration policies.

A central factor that determines parties' trade-offs between vote-seeking strategies on the one hand and policy- and office-seeking on the other is the degree of electoral competition that they are facing (Strøm, 1990; Robertson, 1976). If competition is high, that is, if small changes in votes can lead to big changes in parties' seat share and bargaining position, then parties will follow a vote-maximizing strategy (Immergut and Abou-Chadi, 2014; Abou-Chadi and Orlowski, 2016). However, if parties are rather insulated from competition, office- and policy-seeking motivations should dominate and government parties should become more likely to pass unpopular legislation. Hence,

for the case of immigration reform this means that higher levels of electoral competition should decrease governments' propensity to introduce liberal changes. Hypothesis 2 thus states:

H 2 Increasing electoral competitiveness decreases the likelihood of liberal immigration reforms.

The effect of electoral competitiveness, however, should depend on the salience of the immigration issue. As long as issue salience is low, government parties do not necessarily have to worry about the degree of electoral competition as voters' vote choice is only affected by the issues that they perceive as salient (Bélanger and Meguid, 2008). Yet, in the context of a politicized issue, politicians will not ignore the threat posed by high levels of competition and an anti-immigrant public mood. This can be summarized as hypothesis 3.

H 3 If issue salience is low, increasing electoral competitiveness will matter less for the likelihood of liberal immigration reforms.

### 3 Data, Operationalization and Method

In order to test these hypotheses, I rely on a novel data set that includes information on immigration reforms as well as political institutions, political majorities, issue salience and a new measure of electoral competition at the party level. The data consists of country-years for 11 parliamentary democracies from 1980 to 2006.<sup>4</sup>

The dependent variable measuring liberal changes in immigration policies is based on data collected by Ortega and Peri (2013), which contains updated information on

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<sup>4</sup>The countries included in this study are Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK. Compared to the original data set this study includes the USA, Luxembourg and Japan. Japan and Luxembourg for data availability reasons and the US as a presidential system where party competition follows different incentives.

immigration laws in OECD countries that has originally been gathered by Mayda and Patel (2004). Based on these laws Ortega and Peri (2009) construct two sets of indices that measure the tightness of “entry” and “stay” laws for non-asylum immigrants. Liberalizing change for entry laws includes for example lower requirements for entry and work permits. In the area of stay laws liberalization means for instance a reduction in the number of years necessary to obtain a residence permit or citizenship. Hence, while these laws focus on non-asylum migrants, they are not limited to labor migration but include legislation that for example concerns family reunification.<sup>5</sup> As mentioned before, both indices are set to the value 0 for 1980 and thus only focus on changes within this time period excluding any type of historical variation. The graphical representation of these two indicators over time can be found in Figure 1. For the following analyses I use a dummy variable *immigration reform* that is coded 1 if a liberalizing change occurs in a year in either one of these two areas and 0 otherwise. This leads to a distribution where a liberal reform occurs in about 20% of the country-years. In order to have a clear reference category (i.e no change), I exclude cases with restrictive reforms. I present additional analyses that use a multinomial logit model which avoids excluding these cases.

Four independent variables are necessary to test the hypotheses formulated in this article: government ideology, veto points, degree of electoral competition and issue salience. I define *left government* as a government that does not include a conservative or other right-wing party. This coding of government ideology differs from other studies which calculate some variant of a weighted average of government parties’ policy positions (Koopmans, Michalowski and Waibel, 2012; Breunig and Luedtke, 2008). In contrast to this operationalization and in line with the configurational argumentation proposed in this article, I follow a veto player logic of policy making (Tsebelis, 2002). A left gov-

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<sup>5</sup>A detailed description of the laws can be found here: <http://migration.oxfordjournals.org/content/1/1/47/suppl/DC1>

ernment is not defined by its degree of “leftness” but by the absence of a conservative partisan veto player, i.e. a right-wing party in government that has the potential to block legislation. This reflects the argument that left-of-center parties should be more likely to liberalize immigration policies because of their general ideology rather than become linearly more likely to liberalize with every point of being more left on a scale that largely reflects socio-economic considerations. Left-of-center parties are Social democratic, green and radical left parties. Conservative, Christian democratic and radical right parties are defined as right-wing parties.

In comparative politics and political economy there now exists an abundance of measures for institutional fragmentation in general and veto points in particular (Keefer and Stasavage, 2003; Henisz, 2000; Schmidt, 2000; Huber and Stephens, 2001). Most of these measures derive veto points (or veto players) from countries’ constitutions and create time-constant additive indices which include a multitude of political and societal factors. More in line with the original theory, I follow a dynamic operationalization of veto points that only includes political institutions that have the power to block legislation and takes into account political majorities in these arenas. A dummy variable for *open veto point* is coded 1 if a government does not hold the majority in the first or second chamber as well as if a president with veto power exists and comes from an opposition party. Interacted with the dummy for left government this measure can be used to evaluate hypothesis 1. Left governments face an open veto point in 60 percent of the cases and right governments in 40 percent of them.

In order to investigate the effect of *electoral competitiveness*, I employ a novel measure proposed by Abou-Chadi and Orłowski (2016). This measure is based on the conception that parties’ office gains and their possibilities to influence policy in multi-party systems are dependent on their bargaining position in the legislative party system (see also Laver and Benoit, 2014). Degrees of electoral competition should, thus, be understood as the

relationship between changes in votes and changes in the legislative party position. In order to capture this, the measure consists of two components. First, it estimates how insulated parties are against vote shifts; that is how many votes a party has to win or lose until changes in the legislative party system occur. In the hypothetical case of a pure two-party system with an electoral system that is a hundred per cent proportional a party's insulation is equal to its margin of victory at the previous election. In the real world of multi-party competition and non-proportional electoral systems, measuring insulation becomes of course a lot more difficult. Orłowski (2014) derives a measure for insulation that takes into account the electoral system, geographical distributions of party competition and which parties are more likely to attract voters from one another. Linking a party's seat share to its own and every other party's vote share, it is possible to calculate how many votes a party needs to win or has to lose until its bargaining position changes. Secondly, the measure includes estimates of the likelihood of these vote shifts based on individual-level analyses of vote choices. Following the idea of a "normal vote" (Converse, 1966) this method predicts future election results based on the number of party identifiers and the effect of party identification on vote choices. The resulting composite measure of electoral competitiveness ranges from 0 to 1 for every party. It represents the probability of a vote shift occurring that is big enough to surpass the insulation boundaries for a given party. In order to test hypothesis 2, I use the competitiveness value for the party that represents the head of government and is thus primarily associated with setting policy. For the analyzed sample this is always the value for the mainstream right or mainstream left party in a country. Since the estimation procedure for the competitiveness measure requires several data sources, the availability of this measure reduces the sample to 9 countries for the models that include the competitiveness measure.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>For Switzerland the government mean is used. All results are robust to excluding Switzerland from the analysis

Evaluating hypothesis 3 requires a measure of *issue salience* of the immigration issue. The analyses, thus, include a variable representing the party system agenda for immigration issues based on party manifestos at the previous election. Parties need to systematically address issues that have made it onto the public agenda. While many issues appear on and disappear from the public agenda, once issues have made it to the party system agenda (i.e. they have been picked up by established parties), they can be regarded as politicized because they will affect party competition surrounding these issues (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015, 2010). The party system agenda can be measured as the average issue attention of all parties in government (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015). Based on data from the CMP/MARPOR project and using the operationalization suggested by Alonso and da Fonseca (2011), I include a measure of the party system agenda on immigration and in order to test hypothesis 3 interact it with the degree of electoral competitiveness.

All models include several control variables that have been shown or hypothesized to affect citizenship and immigration policies and are potentially correlated with the main independent variables of interest. In order to control for the amount of immigration to a country, I include a measure of *immigration per capita* in the previous year based on OECD data on inflow of foreign population. While a large number of immigrants on the one hand might make the public less open to liberal reforms, they also constitute a potential electoral group when naturalized (Koopmans, 2013). As standard controls for a country's exposure to globalization and changes in economic performance I include measures for *trade openness* and *economic growth*. Both variables come from the Comparative Welfare States data set (Brady, Huber and Stephens, 2014). Several scholars argue that the dynamics of immigration and the political economy of the welfare state are inherently linked to each other (Brady and Finnigan, 2014; Schierup, Hansen and Castles, 2006). Hence, all models control for *welfare state generosity* measured through



the combined generosity index provided by Scruggs, Jahn and Kuitto (2014). Additionally I control for a country's membership in the European Union and the strength of judicial review, both coded as dummy variables. *EU* membership and *strong courts* have been shown to increase the pressure for liberalizing policies in the field of citizenship and multiculturalism (Joppke, 2001). I also include a dummy variable for *radical right representation* which is coded 1 if a radical right party is represented in parliament. Parliamentary representation provides radical right parties with several tools to influence the public agenda and to politicize the issue of immigration. The coding of which parties belong to the radical right family follows Abou-Chadi (2014) and Mudde (2007).

Since immigration reform is measured through a binary indicator, I use a logit model to estimate the effects of my independent variables. The time-series cross-section nature of the data calls for some model adaptations. I follow Beck, Katz and Tucker (1998) and correct for serial dependence by including a spell counter (for the years leading up to a reform) and three natural cubic splines. In addition to this, the standard errors are clustered by countries. Variations of this approach including a cloglog link instead of a logit link and the cubic polynomial splines suggested by (Carter and Signorino, 2010) can be found in the Appendix. The Appendix also presents the results of a negative binomial model which avoids dichotomizing the change variable and thus also considers the variation of the magnitude of liberalization. All main findings presented here are robust against these alternative specifications.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Main Findings

Table 1 presents the results for the regression analysis of liberal citizenship and immigration reforms. As a result of the logit specification, we cannot meaningfully interpret the size of the b-coefficients. They provide us, however, with information about the direction of the effect on the probability of a liberal reform occurring. The more substantive interpretations that will follow are all based on predicted probabilities. Model 1 shows the effect of the independent variables without any interaction specified. We can see that while the variable for left government has a positive effect it fails to reach statistical significance. Hence, based on this model we cannot conclude that left-of-center governments are more likely to pass liberal immigration reforms than other governments. In line with evidence from small and large N studies, the presence of a radical right party in parliament, however, on average significantly reduces the likelihood of liberal reform. Three other control variables show an effect that reaches conventional levels of statistical significance. There is a significant positive effect for the size of immigration inflow into a country, which speaks for the idea that higher levels of immigration increase the incentive for liberal policies. However, reverse causality is clearly an issue here. It might very well be that more liberal policies lead to higher levels of immigration. Again underlining the findings of previous studies, EU membership and strong courts have a positive effect and increase the likelihood of liberal change in the area of citizenship and immigration.

[Insert Table 1 - Determinants of Immigration Reform - about here]

Model 2 includes an interaction term between left government and open veto point in order to evaluate hypothesis 1. Following this hypothesis we should expect to see that the difference between left and right-of-center governments is stronger in the absence of

a veto point. Indeed, Model 2 now shows a statistically significant positive effect for the left government constitutive term. However, since we are dealing with a non-linear model, interpreting an interaction effect from the coefficients presented in the regression table is not advisable. Hence, Figure 2 presents the predicted probabilities for this relationship. All other independent variables are held at their observed values (Hanmer and Ozan Kalkan, 2013).

[Insert Figure 4 - Predicted Probabilities - Government Ideology and Veto Points  
- about here]

Figure 4 shows how the effect of government ideology on reform likelihood depends on the existence of veto points. It gives the predicted probability of a liberal reform (with a 95% CI) for four different scenarios. In the absence of an open veto point we can see a clear statistically significant difference between left and right-of-center governments. The predicted probability of a liberal reform for a left government without a veto point is about 0.4. For non-left governments in the same constellation the predicted probability is 0.2 and thus 20 points lower. Considering that the base probability of a liberal reform occurring is about 0.2 this constitutes a substantive difference. In contrast, if there is an open veto point, we do not find a statistically significant difference between governments of different ideologies. The predicted probabilities for these two scenarios are nearly identical at around 0.23. The absence of a statistically significant difference in this case is, thus, nearly completely caused by the reduced probability for left governments. Hence, confirming hypothesis 1, left-of-center governments only increase the likelihood of a liberal reform occurring if they are not facing an open veto point. While some left governments may want to liberalize policies, in the presence of an open veto point, they lack the political opportunity to do so.

The results from Model 3 allow us to evaluate the predictions of hypothesis 2. It includes the measure of the level of electoral competitiveness that government parties

are facing. Since this measure is not available for Australia and Belgium, the number of cases in this model is reduced. The newly added variable for competitiveness has a negative and highly statistically significant effect. Hence, when government parties expect elections to be more competitive this reduces the likelihood of immigration policy liberalization. Figure 5 provides predicted probabilities that demonstrate the substantive size of this effect.

[Insert Figure 5 - Predicted Probabilities - Electoral Competitiveness - about  
here]

Figure 5 shows how the predicted probability for immigration policy liberalization decreases with higher levels of electoral competitiveness. While the predicted probability for liberalization amounts to about 35 percent for low levels of competitiveness this likelihood is reduced to around 17 percent. This substantive effect, thus, supports hypothesis 2. When competitiveness is high government parties become less likely to liberalize immigration policies as potential vote losses in these cases would be a lot more harmful for their prospects of being in power or influencing policy more generally.

However, as argued in hypothesis 3, this effect should depend on immigration being a politically salient issue. In order to evaluate this Model 4 includes an interaction effect of issue salience and electoral competitiveness. The average marginal effect and the predicted probabilities necessary to interpret this effect can be found in Figure 6 and 7.

[Insert Figure 6 - Average Marginal Effect - Electoral Competitiveness and Issue  
Salience - about here]

[Insert Figure 7 - Predicted Probabilities - Electoral Competitiveness and Issue  
Salience - about here]

Figure 6 presents the average marginal effect of electoral competitiveness on the likelihood of liberal reforms depending on the level of issue salience. The shaded area

represents the 95% confidence interval around the marginal effect. For lower levels of issue salience (parties dedicating less than 1 percent of their manifestos to immigration issues) we can see that the confidence bounds include 0 and our effect is thus not statistically significant. More than 25% of the cases in this sample fall into this category. For higher levels of issue salience we then see that the average marginal effect of electoral competitiveness increases in magnitude and becomes statistically significant. The substantive difference of this effect becomes clear when looking at the differences in predicted probabilities presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7 shows the relationship between electoral competitiveness and the likelihood of a liberal reform for two different levels of issue salience. The left panel shows the effect of competitiveness for a relatively low level of issue salience (value 0.5) and the right panel presents the same relationship for a higher level of issue salience (value 3). Whereas for a higher level of salience we can see how increasing competitiveness significantly reduces the likelihood of a liberalizing reform, this is not the case for low levels of salience. The findings presented in Figure 6 and 7 thus support hypothesis 3. The anticipated competitiveness of elections only affects government parties' likelihood to introduce liberal reforms if immigration is a salient issue. In that, these findings are in line with the results of previous studies that low levels of issue salience are conducive for liberal change in the area of citizenship and immigration. [This relationship remains largely unchanged if we take into account the interaction effect specified in Model 2. The regression table for this model as well as the predicted probabilities plot can be found in the Appendix.](#)

## 4.2 Robustness

As outlined before, the measurement of liberal reform that has been used in the previous section excludes cases where restrictive laws were passed. While there are only 24 cases of

restrictive reform in this sample, this could still bias the findings. Hence, as a robustness check all analyses were repeated using a multinomial logit distinguishing between no change, restrictive change and liberal change as potential outcomes. Figure 8, 9 and 10 summarize the findings from these analyses. The regression table can be found in the Appendix.

[Insert Figure 8 - Predicted Probabilities - Government Ideology and Veto Points  
MNL Model - about here]

[Insert Figure 9 - Predicted Probabilities - Electoral Competitiveness MNL  
Model - about here]

[Insert Figure 10 - Predicted Probabilities - Electoral Competitiveness and Issue  
Salience MNL model - about here]

All graphs confirm the earlier findings and support hypothesis 1, 2 and 3. Figure 8 shows how the effect of government ideology depends on the presence of a veto point. Again, we can clearly see that there is only a statistically significant difference in the absence of a veto point. This relationship is substantively in the same ball park as earlier. If veto points give right-of-center parties the opportunity to block legislation then the likelihood of a left government passing liberal reform is significantly reduced. We also see a similar picture for the effect of electoral competitiveness in Figure 9. With increasing levels of electoral competition the likelihood of governments passing a liberal reform is significantly reduced. As Figure 10 demonstrates, this effect can be clearly seen for higher levels of issue salience but is substantively weaker for low levels of salience. In short, all main findings hold when running a multinomial logit instead of a logit model that excludes cases with restrictive reforms.

## 5 Conclusion

This article demonstrates that political institutions and electoral competition play a crucial role for determining changes in immigration policies. While a growing body of literature has analyzed how parties' ideologies and public opinion affect changes in this area, they largely do not take into account the institutional context of policy-making. This research makes the problematic assumption that government actors' preferences are directly translated into policy outputs, whereas the links between the actors and the rules structuring their behavior are ignored, or at least under-investigated.

This study contributes to this literature by providing a novel framework for the analysis of immigration reform and by demonstrating its usefulness for explaining empirical variations in 11 industrialized democracies. It shows how political institutions in the form of veto points can block left-of-center governments from passing liberal reforms. The analysis also confirms that government parties that are anticipating elections to be very competitive are far more susceptible to an anti-immigrant public opinion. If the issue of immigration is salient and government parties expect close races the likelihood of liberal change becomes very small.

In a more abstract sense this studies applied a new-institutionalist perspective to the study of citizenship and immigration policies. It is the basic idea of new-institutionalism in political science that in order to analyze the policy-making process it is necessary to not just regard policy outputs as results of actors' preferences, but to analyze the rules that structure actors' goals, choices and behavior. Consequently, the aggregation of individuals' preferences and their behavior cannot be regarded as the driving force of the policy-making process or politics more generally, but one needs to take into account the interplay of institutions and actors (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Immergut, 1998). This study follows this reasoning and derives parties' preferences from the interplay of party competition and public opinion. Moreover, it shows how institutional constraints such

as veto points limit parties in their possibility to turn their preferences into policies.

There are several avenues for further research that could build on this study and its findings. While this paper focuses on explaining liberal change, a similar framework could be used to analyze restrictive reforms such as the introduction of naturalization tests. Moreover, feedback effects should be investigated more thoroughly. How do policies in this field not only affect citizens attitudes but also the dynamics of electoral competition on the issues of citizenship and immigration? Finally, the analysis should move beyond the analysis of the usual suspects of Western Europe and North America and include other democracies such as in Eastern Europe which show big variation in their immigration policies. In short, much more research in this field will be needed. The presented framework and analysis, however, hopefully prove to be a useful basis for these research agendas.



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Table 1: Determinants of Immigration Reform

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Left government	0.466 (0.478)	1.109*** (0.321)	0.430 (0.478)	0.523 (0.542)
Open veto point	-0.233 (0.345)	0.217 (0.387)	0.780** (0.343)	0.923** (0.450)
Radical right	-0.769* (0.427)	-0.808* (0.422)	-0.924** (0.370)	-0.787** (0.332)
Salience	0.066 (0.078)	0.043 (0.077)	-0.006 (0.124)	0.121 (0.173)
Immigration	0.103** (0.044)	0.115*** (0.040)	0.173*** (0.043)	0.171*** (0.044)
Tradeopenness	0.007 (0.006)	0.009* (0.005)	0.013 (0.009)	0.017 (0.011)
Growth	1.564 (4.562)	0.734 (4.614)	2.428 (5.195)	2.324 (5.254)
Welfare generosity	0.021 (0.037)	0.028 (0.040)	-0.040 (0.064)	-0.064 (0.070)
EU	1.599*** (0.583)	1.619*** (0.529)	1.070** (0.533)	1.040** (0.521)
Strong courts	0.660** (0.290)	0.644** (0.292)	0.645 (0.590)	0.671 (0.567)
Left X Veto		-1.175 (0.747)		
Competitiveness			-1.340*** (0.376)	-0.486 (0.762)
Comp X Salience				-0.373 (0.352)
Constant	-5.047*** (1.147)	-5.619*** (1.188)	-2.924 (1.878)	-2.802 (1.763)
Observations	219	219	172	172

Logit models for immigration reform

Clustered standard errors in parentheses

All models include a spell counter and three cubic splines

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$



## Descriptive statistics

Table A1: Descriptive statistics

	mean	sd	min	max	N
Immigration reform	0.20	0.40	0.00	1.00	286
Left government	0.33	0.47	0.00	1.00	352
Radical right representation	0.42	0.49	0.00	1.00	352
Immigration per capita	6.60	3.69	0.11	20.56	298
Tradeopenness	74.99	30.77	28.57	169.01	352
Growth	0.02	0.03	-0.10	0.14	352
Welfare generosity	34.35	6.76	20.40	46.60	335
EU	0.58	0.49	0.00	1.00	352
Strong courts	0.42	0.49	0.00	1.00	352
Open veto point	0.45	0.50	0.00	1.00	352
Competitiveness	0.42	0.30	0.00	0.99	278

Table A2: Determinants of Immigration Reform - Multinomial Logit

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Liberal Change (Reference No Change)			
Left government	1.118*** (0.317)	0.387 (0.445)	0.471 (0.503)
Open veto point	0.258 (0.379)	0.808** (0.331)	0.978** (0.457)
Left X Veto	-1.223* (0.704)		
Radical right	-0.853** (0.421)	-0.960*** (0.350)	-0.849*** (0.299)
Salience	0.023 (0.078)	-0.032 (0.132)	0.121 (0.181)
Immigration	0.105*** (0.024)	0.155*** (0.033)	0.154*** (0.037)
Tradeopenness	0.011** (0.005)	0.015 (0.010)	0.019* (0.011)
Growth	-0.104 (4.734)	1.042 (5.531)	0.507 (5.627)
Welfare generosity	0.023 (0.038)	-0.047 (0.060)	-0.070 (0.066)
EU	1.532*** (0.502)	0.973* (0.510)	0.963* (0.497)
Strong courts	0.646** (0.289)	0.676 (0.598)	0.682 (0.583)
Competitiveness		-1.314*** (0.358)	-0.382 (0.763)
Comp X Salience			-0.401 (0.338)
Constant	-5.425*** (1.280)	-2.610 (1.844)	-2.560 (1.729)
Observations	243	191	191

Multinomial logit models for immigration reform

Clustered standard errors in parentheses

All models include a spell counter and three cubic splines

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A3: Determinants of Immigration Reform - Complementary Log-Log

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Left government	0.434 (0.379)	1.026*** (0.286)	0.360 (0.361)	0.441 (0.396)
Open veto point	-0.185 (0.254)	0.242 (0.300)	0.648*** (0.241)	0.773** (0.338)
Radical right	-0.638* (0.364)	-0.671* (0.361)	-0.810** (0.338)	-0.700** (0.294)
Salience	0.046 (0.065)	0.022 (0.064)	-0.019 (0.124)	0.086 (0.163)
Immigration	0.095*** (0.031)	0.109*** (0.029)	0.144*** (0.031)	0.142*** (0.030)
Tradeopenness	0.007 (0.005)	0.010*** (0.004)	0.011 (0.009)	0.016 (0.010)
Growth	2.168 (3.893)	1.256 (3.988)	2.740 (4.525)	2.591 (4.505)
Welfare generosity	0.010 (0.030)	0.016 (0.032)	-0.041 (0.063)	-0.061 (0.064)
EU	1.406*** (0.501)	1.427*** (0.446)	0.898** (0.458)	0.838* (0.450)
Strong courts	0.551** (0.234)	0.560** (0.239)	0.533 (0.501)	0.577 (0.475)
Left X Veto		-1.048 (0.654)		
Competitiveness			-1.070*** (0.281)	-0.337 (0.667)
Comp X Salience				-0.330 (0.338)
Constant	-4.579*** (0.935)	-5.188*** (1.047)	-2.617 (1.647)	-2.530* (1.532)
Observations	219	219	172	172

Cloglog models for immigration reform

Clustered standard errors in parentheses

All models include a spell counter and three cubic splines

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A4: Determinants of Immigration Reform - Logit with Carter/Signorino Correction

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Left government	0.466 (0.472)	1.092*** (0.342)	0.480 (0.453)	0.572 (0.521)
Open veto point	-0.165 (0.350)	0.273 (0.393)	0.843** (0.349)	0.980** (0.451)
Radical right	-0.729* (0.405)	-0.771* (0.394)	-0.862** (0.353)	-0.720** (0.345)
Salience	0.064 (0.071)	0.042 (0.068)	-0.001 (0.103)	0.121 (0.140)
Immigration	0.103** (0.046)	0.113*** (0.043)	0.175*** (0.046)	0.172*** (0.045)
Tradeopenness	0.007 (0.006)	0.009* (0.005)	0.012 (0.009)	0.017 (0.011)
Growth	2.115 (4.623)	1.201 (4.715)	3.093 (5.552)	3.009 (5.615)
Welfare generosity	0.020 (0.036)	0.027 (0.039)	-0.037 (0.054)	-0.059 (0.064)
EU	1.547** (0.602)	1.567*** (0.549)	1.001* (0.565)	0.980* (0.553)
Strong courts	0.665** (0.285)	0.650** (0.281)	0.646 (0.530)	0.686 (0.506)
Left X Veto		-1.143 (0.749)		
Competitiveness			-1.366*** (0.355)	-0.559 (0.687)
Comp X Salience				-0.357 (0.329)
Constant	-5.187*** (0.964)	-5.768*** (1.067)	-3.305** (1.386)	-3.222** (1.276)
Observations	219	219	172	172

Logit models for immigration reform  
Clustered standard errors in parentheses  
All models include a spell counter  
and a squared and cubic spell counter  
\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A5: Determinants of Immigration Reform - Model including both interactions

	(1)
Left government	0.897* (0.479)
Open veto point	1.095** (0.457)
Left X Veto	-0.686 (0.996)
Competitiveness	-0.492 (0.727)
meanim	0.121 (0.181)
compmeanim	-0.359 (0.367)
Radical right representation	-0.865** (0.387)
Immigration per capita	0.172*** (0.045)
Tradeopenness	0.017* (0.010)
Growth	1.891 (5.466)
Welfare generosity	-0.047 (0.090)
EU	1.068** (0.480)
Strong courts	0.651 (0.547)
Constant	-3.422 (2.323)
Observations	172

Logit models for immigration reform

Clustered standard errors in parentheses

All models include a spell counter and three cubic splines

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Figure A1: Predicted Probabilities based on Table A5

Table A6: Determinants of Immigration Reform - Negative Binomial

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Left government	0.391 (0.362)	0.926*** (0.231)	0.337 (0.364)	0.409 (0.403)
Open veto point	-0.143 (0.247)	0.245 (0.273)	0.688*** (0.178)	0.786*** (0.267)
Radical right	-0.534* (0.316)	-0.570* (0.311)	-0.721** (0.281)	-0.626** (0.272)
Salience	0.045 (0.055)	0.028 (0.054)	-0.001 (0.088)	0.081 (0.110)
Immigration	0.078*** (0.028)	0.087*** (0.022)	0.135*** (0.029)	0.134*** (0.029)
Tradeopenness	0.004 (0.004)	0.006* (0.003)	0.008 (0.007)	0.012 (0.009)
Growth	0.145 (3.111)	-0.415 (3.177)	0.545 (3.902)	0.450 (3.792)
Welfare generosity	0.017 (0.030)	0.025 (0.032)	-0.021 (0.046)	-0.037 (0.049)
EU	0.983** (0.412)	1.005*** (0.369)	0.533 (0.398)	0.514 (0.383)
Strong courts	0.459** (0.215)	0.458** (0.222)	0.353 (0.380)	0.381 (0.372)
Left X Veto		-0.973** (0.449)		
Competitiveness			-1.032*** (0.293)	-0.483 (0.473)
Comp X Salience				-0.249 (0.246)
Constant	-3.958*** (0.820)	-4.520*** (0.847)	-2.655** (1.293)	-2.613** (1.257)
Observations	219	219	172	172

Negative binomial regression for immigration reform

Clustered standard errors in parentheses

All models include a spell counter and three cubic splines

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$